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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 04/08/08

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1) TOP HEADLINES

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Shirakawa set to be approved as BOJ chief, but appointment of Watanabe as deputy governor uncertain

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Olympic torch relay cut short in Paris

Akahata:

JCP points out problems in medical system for very old patients

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2) EDITORIALS

Asahi:

- (1) Japan should also decide to eliminate cluster bombs
- (2) Basketball association: Don't disappoint children's dreams

Mainichi:

- (1) With new plan for BOJ top posts, settlement should be reached
- (2) Upper House pension debate: We no longer want to listen to excuses

Yomiuri:

- (1) Put end to dispute over nominations for BOJ top posts
- (2) Poll shows political mess cooling public support for constitutional revision

Nikkei:

- (1) Vacant seat will be finally filled if Shirakawa assumes governorship, but problems remain
- (2) Change policy to increase ODA disbursements

Sankei:

- (1) Olympic torch relay: Solution based on Olympic spirit desired
- (2) U.S.-Russia summit leaves possibility of new cold war in future

Tokyo Shimbun:

- (1) Fukuda administration should reflect on mishandling of nominations for BOJ top posts
- (2) U.S., Russian leaders end meeting without results

Akahata:

- (1) Stop work for free or for long hours by corporate managers

3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, April 7

08:04

Arrived at Kantei.

09:00

Attended an Upper House Budget Committee session.

12:05

Met with Finance Minister Nukaga, joined by Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura. Nukaga remained.

13:00

Attended an Upper House Budget Committee session.

16:35

Met with Nukaga and Machimura.

17:23

Attended an LDP executives' meeting.

17:55

Met with MOFA Asian and Oceanic Affairs Bureau Director-General

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Saiki at Kantei.

18:21

Met with Machimura.

18:55

Dined with Nippon Keidanren Chairman Mitarai, Toyota Motor Advisor Hiroshi Okuda, NTT Chairman Norio Wada, Nippon Steel Corporation Honorary Chairman Takashi Imai and others at Le Trianon at Grand Prince Hotel Akasaka.

20:31

Arrived at Kantei residence.

4) Poll: 42.5 PERCENT for constitutional revision, 43.1 PERCENT against

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Full)

April 8, 2008

The proportion of people against constitutional change outstripped that of those for it, though slightly, the Yomiuri Shimbun found from its recent face-to-face nationwide public opinion survey. In the survey, 42.5 PERCENT answered that they think it would be better to revise the Constitution, with 43.1 PERCENT saying they think it would be better not to revise it. However, a total of 71 PERCENT think political parties should further discuss the Constitution. Meanwhile, more than 70 PERCENT also think it would be better to amend some of the Constitution's provisions or add new provisions to the Constitution. People seem to be strongly aware that Japan's postwar constitution, which will mark its 61st anniversary this year, has now become outdated in many respects.

The survey was conducted Mar. 15-16 as a part of the Yomiuri Shimbun's annual serial polling on Japan and its people.

The serial survey on the Constitution started in 1981. In the 1993 and following surveys, the proportion of those in favor of constitutional change consistently outstripped that of those against it. In the latest survey, however, the proportion of pro-revision people decreased 3.7 percentage points from last year. Meanwhile, the proportion of anti-revision people increased 4.0 points, topping the proportion of pro-revision people. Former Prime Minister Abe was strongly willing to revise the Constitution, but he suddenly stepped down. In addition, the Diet has been divided, with the ruling coalition dominating its lower chamber and the opposition camp controlling its upper chamber. This parliamentary standoff has brought about the current stagnation of state affairs. The results of the survey this time can be taken as reflecting such factors.

In the survey, those in favor of constitutional revision were asked to pick one or more reasons. Among them, the most common reason was "because the Constitution can no longer allow Japan to meet

international contributions and many other newly arising challenges," accounting for 45 PERCENT . Among those negative about constitutional revision, the most common reason was "because it is a pacifist constitution Japan can boast of in the world" at 53 PERCENT .

When asked to pick one or more concerns about the Constitution, "war renunciation and the Self-Defense Forces" accounted for 47 PERCENT , topping all other answers for the seventh year in a row. "Court

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trials" accounted for 20 PERCENT (15 PERCENT in last year's survey). This shows the public's growing concern about the lay judge system.

Respondents were also asked for multiple answers about what they thought it would be better to amend or add. To this question, many cited Japan's possession of armed forces for self-defense (27 PERCENT), "right to live in a good environment" (25 PERCENT), and "state and local roles" (22 PERCENT). "Nothing in particular" accounted for 24 PERCENT .

5) DPJ set to approve nomination of Shirakawa as BOJ governor but likely to oppose appointment of Watanabe as deputy governor

ASAHI (Top Play)
April 8, 2008

The government yesterday made a proposal to the Diet to appoint Bank of Japan (BOJ) Deputy Governor Masaaki Shirakawa as BOJ governor and Hitotsubashi University Professor Hiroshi Watanabe as one of the central bank's two deputy governors. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has decided to agree on Shirakawa's promotion, but the party is likely to oppose the nomination of Watanabe, a former vice finance minister for international affairs, reflecting party leader Ozawa's opposition to the idea.

The government had intended to submit the plan of nominating Watanabe for the BOJ deputy governor post in yesterday early afternoon but delay it by about five years. Some officers in the government and the ruling parties suggested that if no prospects are in sight for the main opposition party to approve the Watanabe plan, they should put off presenting the plan or submitting only the plan for Shirakawa governorship plan. But reflecting Prime Minister Fukuda's strong desire to nominate a former Finance Ministry official well versed in financial policy for one of the three top posts, the government and the ruling camp decided to present the plan of nominating Shirawawa and Watanabe without ensuring the DPJ's agreement.

The Steering Committees of both chambers of the Diet Affairs Committee will hold hearings with Shirakawa and Watanabe today. If the Shirakawa plan is endorsed in plenary sessions of both Houses of the Diet tomorrow, the governorship will be filled after a lapse of about three weeks. The government wants to send Shirakawa to a meeting of the Group of Seven (G-7) finance ministers and central bank governors to be held in Washington on April 11.

DPJ executives, including Ozawa and Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama discussed how to respond to the government's new plan last night. Hatoyama insisted that the party should give an agreement to the plan, but Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka and House of Councillors chairman Azuma Okoshi expressed their opposition.

6) Government, ruling bloc on defensive over pension issue at Upper House budget panel with no golden remedy in sight

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
April 8, 2008

Keishi Yoshida

At a session yesterday of the Upper House Budget Committee, Prime

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Minister Yasuo Fukuda offered an apology for the first time for the unidentified 50 million pension accounts, by saying, "We have provided misleading information." The prime minister apparently had to admit that the ruling parties' campaign pledge advocated in the Upper House election last year made the public expect that the pension fiasco would be resolved in March. The government is now desperate to restore public confidence, but there is no golden remedy to do so. The ruling parties appear helpless in face of verbal attacks from the opposition bloc, which is gaining momentum.

Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated, "We will identify every owner of the unidentified accounts to pay pension correctly." Health and Labor Minister Yoichi Masuzoe remarked, "We will deadly endeavor to identify the last unidentified one yen account."

At an Upper House Budget Committee hearing yesterday, Masamitsu Naito of the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), citing a series of remarks made by senior ruling coalition members concerning the unidentified pension premium accounts, grilled Fukuda by arguing, "You fabricated the campaign pledge. You should offer a sincere apology." Fukuda, admitting that "there was the phrase that misled the public," apologized: "We have made (the public) harbor excessive hopes. I must apologize for that."

Until then the prime minister brushed aside any criticism over the pension issue by noting, "We have pushed ahead with the process of identifying the mysterious accounts." But faced with the fact that 40 PERCENT of those accounts still remain unidentified at present, Fukuda appeared to conclude that he was unable to make any more excuse.

Still, Fukuda did not admit to violation of the campaign pledge till the last. The DPJ is insisting that the government can't turn the current measures around unless it admits its mistake. The DPJ has urged the government to check 850 million handwritten records with the records stored in the computer. But it is never an easy task to earmark billion yen or perhaps more as a budget to do so. All the government can do now would be at least to increase the number of staff who will be engaged in checking the unidentified records. A senior Social Insurance Agency official revealed difficulties in identifying the mysterious records, by noting, "There seems to be no showy resolution."

Taking advantage of the difficulties the government has faced, the DPJ has shifted its tactic to use both the pension fiasco and the new medical care system for the elderly to attack the government. At a budget committee hearing yesterday, Nobuo Matsuno of the DPJ, eyeing the start of withholding insurance premiums for the new medical system on April 15, grilled the prime minister with this expression, "Withholding the premiums all of sudden is what a cruel bailiff can do."

In response, the government assumed a defensive stance by abruptly changing the name of the system and indicating this simulation that in the case of those who receive a full amount of a pension from the government (66,000 yen per month), the current premium of 2,800 yen will decline to 1,000 yen or so. But the premium will be unavoidably raised in the future. But the government is unable to come up with a next step.

7) DPJ has run out of ammunition for attack?: Lacked punch in pursuing pension issue

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SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
April 8, 2008

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) is enthusiastic about attacking the government with one noting, "We will thoroughly pursue pension and medical services issues, following the road funds issue." However, during intensive deliberations on social security matters held on April 7 at the House Budget Committee, they did nothing but ask questions that have already been taken up in the Diet. All the more because President Ichiro Ozawa during a press

conference on the 1st had emphatically revealed his determination to consider submitting a censure motion against Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Yoichi Masuzoe, their approach gave the impression that they lacked punch.

Four DPJ members asked questions that day, of whom three brought up the pension premium payment record issue. Masamitsu Naito said that there are omissions of benefit payments even in cases which the Social Insurance Agency categorized as "settled." He criticized the case as the camouflage of words. He succeeded in having Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda offering an apology. However, Masuzoe fended off his pursuit, saying, "We will investigate into the case in order of priority." Questions the remaining two asked lacked freshness. The government's side repeatedly made the same replies it gave previously.

The Budget Committee meeting on the 7th was televised nationwide. However, the DPJ saved members who have actively brought up the pension issue, including Renho, for an Upper House Health, Labor and Welfare meeting on the 8th. However, since their pursuit of the government was sluggish, some DPJ members criticized the party's strategy, saying, "It was a strategic mistake that we did not let them take part in the televised Budget Committee meeting." On the other hand, some ruling party members made a remark in a relaxed manner, "The DPJ is continuing to make a fuss over the pension issue. They might have run out of ammunition for an attack."

8) 42 governors want provisional taxation restored

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Abridged)
April 8, 2008

The Yomiuri Shimbun conducted a questionnaire survey of all governors about restoring gasoline and other provisional tax rates and about incorporating road-related tax revenues into the state's general account budget for general-purpose spending as well as for road construction and other road-related infrastructure projects.

Among the 47 governors, 42 supported the idea of restoring the gasoline and other provisional tax rates, with none of them opposing it. The governors of five prefectures-Aomori, Iwate, Akita, Kanagawa, and Kyoto-did not specify whether or not they support the idea of restoring the provisional tax rates. When asked about the idea of using road-related tax revenues for general purposes, "yes" came from only four governors, including the governor of Tokushima Prefecture. "No" came from 11 governors, including Tokyo's. Meanwhile, 32 governors did not specify whether or not they support it.

The 42 governors in support of restoring the provisional tax rates complained of their plights, with Miyazaki Gov. Hideo

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Higashikokubaru saying, "This will also affect healthcare, welfare, education, and other areas." The same question was asked in a nationwide public opinion survey conducted by the Yomiuri Shimbun on Apr. 1-2. In this public opinion survey, "yes" accounted for 27 PERCENT, with "no" at 57 PERCENT. The results show a perception gap between the people and the governors.

9) Former LDP policy chief Ishihara: Dual overrides of Upper House decisions difficult

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
April 8, 2008

Nobuteru Ishihara, former chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party Policy Research Council, said yesterday in a speech in Tokyo:

"It will be quite difficult as a political matter to take revotes in the House of Representatives on tax-related bills in April and on a bill amending the Special Taxation Measures Law in May. If (the opposition) submits a censure motion against Prime Minister Fukuda to the House of Councillors and the motion is adopted there, we will not be able to do anything in the Diet. Calls for a vote of confidence may become strong."

10) Koizumi, Koga expecting early Lower House dissolution

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Abridged slightly)
April 8, 2008

LDP Election Strategy Council Chairman Makoto Koga and former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made speeches at a fund-raising party held yesterday evening by the LDP Kanagawa chapter. In their speeches, the two leaders pointed out the possibility of an early dissolution of the House of Representatives.

Koga said about the timing for Lower House dissolution for a snap general election:

"Throwing a party like this, the Kanagawa chapter has demonstrated its readiness for the next election. Your observation of the political situation is splendid. I, too, must say, 'Something is coming up,' rather than to note, 'An election within the year is unlikely.'"

Koizumi said:

"I feel that a certain kind of wind (wind of dissolution) has begun to blow. In the pervious Lower House election, all candidates (including those who ran in the proportional representation segment) backed by the prefectural chapter were able to win seats, so you really need to buckle down. The divided Diet has brought about an age of tremendous change. Only those lawmakers and political parties that can deal with change can survive."

Koizumi also underlined the need for boldness and flexibility.

Koga had previously expressed hope that the next Lower House election will take place around September 2009, when the Lower House members' term of office expires. Koizumi, too, had noted, "There is a possibility that the Lower House will be dissolved after next year's G-8 summit." They made the statements yesterday in an effort to brace up the party and to apply pressure on the major opposition

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Democratic Party of Japan, which is taking an increasingly antagonistic stance against the Fukuda administration.

11) "Tax code revision discussions will cover consumption tax as well," says premier

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
April 8, 2008

Prime Minister Fukuda during an Upper House Budget Committee meeting on April 7 once again indicated his intention to implement his proposal for reallocating special-purpose road construction revenues to the general account in the tax code revision for fiscal 2009, even if revision talks with opposition parties do not take place. He indicated his perception that a hike in the consumption tax will also be subject to discussion, noting, "Whether the consumption tax should be increased or not will naturally be discussed in amending the tax code. The consumption tax will naturally be included in the tax code revision for the next fiscal year, if proposed expenditures or payouts financed with a hike in the consumption tax are appropriate for the nature of the tax." He made this remark in replying to a question asked by Social Democratic Party (SDP) member Masamichi Kondo.

12) Japan-Russia vice minister level strategic dialogue held to pave way for visit to Russia by Prime Minister Fukuda

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
April 8, 2008

The Japanese and Russian governments held yesterday a vice minister level strategic dialogue at the Foreign Ministry's Iikura Guest House in Tokyo. With an eye on a visit to Russia by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda planned for sometime before the Group of Eight summit in July in Hokkaido, the vice minister-level officials discussed a

broad range of issues, including the Northern Territories issue. They confirmed that Tokyo and Moscow would raise a bilateral relationship a higher dimension through summit-level political dialogue.

Yesterday's strategic dialogue was the fourth since such exchanges were initiated in January last year. Vice Administrative Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka and First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Denisov attended the session. The two officials exchanged views on the resources development in East Siberia, for which the Russian side has sought Japan's technical cooperation, and bilateral cooperation on the environmental area for the G8 summit. They appear to have discussed the missile defense development, which the United States has planned in East Europe.

Yabunaka in a press conference yesterday stated: "Russia has strong interest in the Asia-Pacific region. There are areas in which the two countries can cooperate more than ever." He then expressed eagerness for building a close relationship with Russia.

13) Vice Foreign Minister Yabunaka to visit U.S. on April 9

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
April 8, 2008

The Foreign Ministry announced yesterday that Administrative Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka will leave for Washington tomorrow

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for a four-day visit. He is expected to exchange views with Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte on a series of incidents involving

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U.S. military personnel in Japan, as well as on the state of Diet deliberations on a new bill on Japan's host nation support for U.S. forces in Japan. This will be Yabunaka's first visit to the United States since taking office.

14) Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau chief Saiki to meet Assistant Secretary of State Hill

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NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
April 8, 2008

The Foreign Ministry announced yesterday that Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Akitaka Saiki will visit Beijing for two days from today. The main purpose of his visit is to be briefed by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill about his talks with his North Korean counterpart today in Singapore on the North's nuclear programs.

15) Discussion on aid to Africa starts

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
April 8, 2008

The Africa Partnership Forum for donor nations, including G8 members, to discuss how to help Africa with representatives of 21 African nations started in Tokyo yesterday. Participants will finalize their discussions on climate change and economic growth in the form of a chairman's summary and have it reflected in the July Lake Toya G8 Summit in Hokkaido, where Africa will be a major item on the agenda.

16) MOD reform council: Debate on procurement reform losing steam due to calming down Moriya scandal

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Abridged slightly)
April 8, 2008

The government's Council on Reform of the Ministry of Defense, chaired by Tokyo Electric Power Co. advisor Nobuya Minami, discussed yesterday a final report on reform of equipment procurement, produced by the MOD in the wake of a bribery scandal involving

former Vice-Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya. Calls for sweeping reform emerged following a string of scandals that followed a 1998 bill-padding scandal involving the then Defense Agency Central Procurement Office. This time around, the interest of the Prime Minister's Office (Kantei) and the ruling coalition centered on the MOD's organizational reform. Given the Moriya scandal that is likely to be concluded in time, the discussion on procurement reform, however, lost steam in the end, concluding that the matter requiring specialized expertise must be left to the MOD.

The report released by the MOD in late March is designed to (1) require the ministry to make direct inquiries to overseas manufacturers about estimates, and (2) collect twice the difference in penalty for bill padding. Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba initially ordered to consider concluding contracts directly with makers without trading firms. This drew objections, with one saying, "Nurturing a large number of experts replacing trading firms is difficult." In the end, numerical targets of direct contracts and other factors were not presented. Further, modalities for the three

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weapons-export principles, which were expected to become a point at issue, did not make the report.

In yesterday's meeting, members said, "The ministry should first explain to the public on what kind of equipment it needs," or "A system must be created in which the MOD self-examines the efficacy of equipment to be procured." However, with no experts in procurement in its members, the council is heading toward bringing down the curtain on its discussion, as seen in a high-ranking government official's comment, "Contentious points have generally been discussed." Procurement is apparently placed on the backburner, with attention focused on the MOD's organizational reform, such as Ishiba's plan to integrate the internal bureaus with the Self-Defense Forces.

Further, with the Moriya scandal stopped short of escalating into a political scandal, the government's initial plan to structurally reform the procurement system has now lost steam. "The report includes only minor items that can be implemented immediately," a senior MOD official said.

17) Suprapartisan parliamentary league to resume activities to establish SDF dispatch permanent law

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
April 8, 2008

The Young Parliamentarians' League to Establish a Security System for a New Century, which is composed of junior and mid-level lawmakers from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, its coalition partner New Komeito, and the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), will resume its activities for the first time in three years. The league plans to hold a general meeting in April. The aim is to back an argument calling for formulating a permanent (general) law enabling Japan to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) overseas as required, debate on which has been stalled due to the divided Diet, in which the opposition camp holds the majority in the House of Councillors.

The parliamentary league has ceased its activities since April 2005 when its some members made an inspection of the East China gas fields. The group will ask former LDP Security Research Commission Chairman Gen Nakatani, former DPJ President Seiji Maehara, and Isamu Ueda of the New Komeito to participate in the planned meeting. About

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100 legislators will likely take part in the meeting.

SCHIEFFER